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SUBJECT: CREATING A DIGITAL BANGLADESH: POSTS AND  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS MINISTER DESCRIBES GRAND AMBITIONS

Summary  
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¶1. (SBU) Bangladesh,s Posts and Telecommunications Minister, Rajiuddin Ahmed Raju, described at length his ambitious plans for expanding the country,s telecommunications infrastructure ) towards the goal of creating a &digital Bangladesh8 by the year 2021. In a meeting with the Ambassador on July 15, Raju spoke of the need to increase foreign investment and promote public-private partnerships in the telecommunications sector. He also declared that the government was committed to extending internet connectivity to the rural areas. The Ambassador noted that a number of American firms were interested in the participating in this endeavor.

A computer in every school  
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¶2. (SBU) The Minister pointed out that the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) would start deploying fiber optic cable in the headquarters of the districts and sub-districts throughout the country. However, because a majority of the population resided in remote rural areas, the GOB planned to make internet available in the villages nationwide by using wireless broadband. Raju added that one of his chief priorities was to put a computer in every school house, noting that unlike children in the capital, most children in the villages did not have access to the benefits of technology. The Ambassador replied that a number of American companies were watching developments closely. He pointed out that the prospects for new initiatives like telemedicine, following the expansion of internet connectivity, were exciting.

And a phone in every pocket(  
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¶3. (SBU) The Ministry,s Secretary mentioned that the present government,s strategy also was to increase levels of cell phone penetration ) raising it from slightly under 40 percent of the population owning cell phones to 95 percent in the next 10 years. He added that rising levels of cell phone usage had revolutionized life in the villages, pointing out that the cost of phone calls had also dropped significantly in the last several years. As a result of cell phone technology people living in villages were now able to communicate more easily and conduct business with one another. The Ambassador agreed that Bangladesh had been successful in leapfrogging an entire phase of technology in its telecommunications development.

Public private partnerships  
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¶4. (SBU) The Ambassador inquired whether the private sector would be involved in the government,s initiatives. The Minister noted that private sector involvement was critical

and that Grameenphone, the country's leading phone and internet provider, was already working with the GOB in the rural areas. (Note: another leading NGO, Bangladesh Rural Advanced Committee (BRAC), is also involved in technology related initiatives in the villages. End note.) He also added that wireless broadband and other technologies, like voice over internet protocol, would be open to foreign investment. According to the Minister, the Chinese and the Japanese governments were planning to offer nearly \$1 billion in soft loans for telecommunications infrastructure projects in the country. Both the Ministry and the Secretary reiterated that the GOB wanted to expand their projects further but were resource constrained ) and therefore desired even greater private investments and multilateral aid. The Ambassador replied that we would continue to make sure that American companies helped Bangladesh in any way they could.

Comment  
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15. (SBU) The Minister's plans, while grand, could help revolutionize Bangladesh if fully implemented. The potential to have a significant impact in the lives of 150 million people and the opportunity for U.S. companies remains huge. Clearly, the GOB does not have the resources or the capacity to go it alone and will need outside help. There are a number of American companies that fit the bill both in terms of developing the country's telecommunications infrastructure and also follow on technologies that make use of it. Post will continue to work with the U.S. private sector to maximize U.S. firms' profitable participation in

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creating a digital Bangladesh.  
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